THE CURRENT STATUS OF COLLABORATION BETWEEN INFORMATION SCIENCE Ph.D. PROGRAMS IN THAILAND

NAMTIP WIPAWIN

Department of Information Science, School of Liberal Arts, Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University, Thailand, Associate Professor

SONGLAK SAKULWICHITSINTU

Department of Information Science, School of Liberal Arts, Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University, Thailand, Assistant Professor

CHIRABODEE TEJASEN

Library and Information Science, Faculty of Liberal Arts, Thammasat University, Thailand, Lecturer

ABSTRACT

The research aimed to establish and outline the current status of collaboration among information science Ph.D. programs in Thailand. This is a qualitative study that employed semi-structured interviews as the research instrument. Interviews were conducted, in 2020 and 2021, with six faculty members from three universities offering doctoral studies in information science in Thailand. These included Chulalongkorn University, Khon Kaen University, and Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University. The research findings show that collaboration among Ph.D. programs in information science in Thailand involves both formal and informal activities. Formal activities included co-supervision of dissertations and guest lectures while informal activities were joint seminars and conferences. This research suggests that to forge a more fruitful collaboration among Ph.D. programs in information science in Thailand, more activities need to be initiated, such as research collaboration, content sharing in MOOCs, and compilation of the Thai information science expert register. The benefit of national collaboration will enhance the strength of the information science education and professions within the country, as well as the pursuit for collaboration at an international level.

Introduction

The past two decades have seen a significant effort to develop LIS education collaboration either among educators and institutions in every region in Europe, North America,

Africa, and ASEAN.[1,2,3,4,5,6,7] For example, the start of iSchools enabled twenty-four iSchools in the United States and Canada join the "iCaucus," a forum in which iSchools' deans collaborate to organize "iConference" for knowledge sharing forums since 2009. *Virkus*[8] also found the important challenge for European LIS education and the opportunity to prepare students for the global employment market with international competencies and experiences and to upskill information professionals. The similarities of collaboration of each region and ASEAN are organizing conferences and workshops, and a consortium of information schools.

LIS education collaboration started in 1954 when a group of Thai librarians and educators who attended library science courses organized a meeting at Chulalongkorn University under the Fulbright program to establish the Thai Library Association (TLA) and shared human resources among institutions. With the advice of the librarians of the United States Information Service in Bangkok, the members of that group met regularly to discuss library problems so as to find ways of improving their libraries and promoting library services. Since 1976, the Thai Library Association has been under the Royal Patronage of Her Royal Highness Princess *Maha Chakri Sirindhorn.* In 1951, five professors under the Fulbright commission were teaching library courses for five years and awarded 77 students who completed the six basic courses at the Faculty of Arts, Chulalongkorn University.[9,10] In 1955, the first Thai library school was established in the Department of Library Science, Faculty of Arts, Chulalongkorn University. Initially, the department only offered diploma program, and later an undergraduate program in 1957.

In 1964, the Master's degree program in Library Science was introduced with theoretical courses such as library history and library administration, practical courses such as cataloging and classification, and reference services. In 1965 the Advanced Certificate was introduced in Library Science at the College of Education, Prasanmitr Campus (Srinakharinwirot University). It was a one-year post bachelor's degree program aimed to produce school librarians. It comprised three main subjects, namely: survey of library science, theory and technical process, and practicum in library service.[11]

In 2003, the doctoral program in Information Studies was introduced at Khon Kaen University. The curriculum focuses on the integration of a knowledge base in management; information, communications and technology (ICT) and social knowledge. Graduates are expected to have competencies in management, ICT, knowledge and information management, and research. There are 2 plans: Plan A with 48 credits dissertation and 9 audit courses, and Plan B with 36 credit dissertation; 9 audit, 9 credit required courses, and 9 electives. Required courses for Plan B include academic writing, research methodology and statistics for information studies and seminar on information, communication, and technology (ICT).

In 2010 Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University (STOU) started a Doctor of Philosophy Program in Information Science. The objectives of the Ph.D. Program in

Information Science was to produce distance learning doctoral graduate programs in Information Science.

In 2021, Chulalongkorn University offers the Ph.D. Program in Information Studies (English Program) in the Department of Library Science, Faculty of Arts.

Research objective

The research aimed to establish and outline the current status of collaboration among information science Ph.D. programs in Thailand.

Research method

This research employed semi-structured interviews as the method for data collection. The population consisted of 6 faculty members from three universities where Ph.D. program in information science was offered, namely, Chulalongkorn University, Khon Kaen University and STOU. Data collection took place between 2020 and 2021. Qualitative data were analyzed using the content analysis method.

Findings and discussion

Collaboration among Ph.D. programs in information science in Thailand is carried out using both formal and informal activities.

Formal activities
Formal activities include co-supervision of dissertations and guest lectures. Both collaborative activities are to benefit students in one Ph.D. program to learn from expertise and experience of faculty members in another Ph.D. program.

Just as with any other doctoral studies program in Thailand, the information science Ph.D. curricula require students to conduct research and write a thesis. The Ph.D. program appoints one faculty member to supervise and advise every student. However, it was found that in most cases students were co-supervised due to the fact that information science is interdisciplinary. While the major supervisor comes from the university in which the student enrolls, co-supervisors may possibly be recruited from other institutions. For example, several Ph.D. students at STOU had their thesis co-supervisors from other universities including Chulalongkorn University. Usually, a co-supervisor is invited through direct personal contact. In some cases, an indirect personal connection plays a part in recruiting a co-supervisor. This is where the collaboration takes place. Two or more scholars work side by side to guide a doctoral student throughout the course of his or her research. All participants agreed that co-supervision would provide students

with opportunities to learn and benefit from the expertise of their supervisors. In addition, it could be a chance for both supervisors, as researchers themselves, to learn from each other's experiences.

Although doctoral studies embrace deep and critical thinking through group discussion, lectures are still one of the means by which lessons are delivered. The findings established that the Ph.D. programs would assign a faculty member to be responsible for a given subject. She or he would convene lectures throughout the semester. However, there are occasions on which speakers are invited from outside the home institutions to give lectures. Often, guest lecturers are invited among Ph.D. programs. Topics of guest lecturers are normally those in which the speakers specialize. These guest lectures are an opportunity for students to learn directly from an expert, who may otherwise be only teaching in her or his home institution. It should be noted, however, that such a beneficial collaboration usually arises from initial personal contact. All participants agreed that they had been able to invite guest speakers from other Ph.D. programs within the country because they had known the speakers personally or there was someone who could help reach out to the speakers.

Informal activities

Informal activities consisted of cooperation in organizing academic seminars, academic conferences and engaging in the library journals' editorial board. The purpose of the cooperation in organizing academic seminars was to provide a platform for students from all institutions to get to know each other. It also supported the building of a community of learners or people with common interests. In addition, it is the development of academic cooperation networks in the management of information science education between Khon Kaen University, Chulalongkorn University and STOU. This caused the exchange of knowledge in both teaching and learning, curriculum, and research. Participants had the opportunity to express their opinions and exchange their views that will be of academic benefit to teachers and students from different institutions. As part of the academic conference, it is an international academic conference both online and offline with cooperation from relevant organizations and various educational institutions both in the country and abroad. For instance, the International Conference on Library and Information Science: From Open Library to Open Society (iCOO 2018). The conference was organized by the Library and Information Science Society for Asia and the Pacific (LISSASPAC) in association with the School of Liberal Arts of STOU, KISTI-Keimyung University, Chonbuk National University (Graduate School of Archives and Records Management & Institute of Culture Convergence Archiving), Thai Library Association under the Royal Patronage of H.R.H. Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn, the Ph.D. Program in Information Science, Faculty of Informatics, Mahasarakham University, and Faculty of Humanities and Social Science, Khon Kaen University. Another example is the academic conference by cooperation between STOU and the

Polytechnic University of the Philippines Open University System (PUP–OUS). In the last academic conference (2021), it was named the 4th Multidisciplinary Online Research Colloquium: Optimising Research Engagement and Virtual Classroom Experience in Open and Distance Learning. It is an ongoing academic conference with alternating hosts enhancing learning and exchanging a wide range of academic knowledge and experiences in information technology, social sciences and related issues in the learning environment of open and distance learning. For the collaboration in the library journals' editorial board, there are T.L.A. Bulletin and TLA Research Journal, under the TLA.

Informal activities enhance the strength of information science education and professions within the country, as well as the pursuit for collaboration at an international level. Informal activities are joint-seminars and conferences. This is consistent with the research of international academic cooperation that enables interactions both face-to-face and online. This results in systematic management of success and challenges together with promoting academic cooperation between countries, which can be regarded as a fundamental strategy for the development of higher education.[12]

However, several studies have shown that the importance or benefits of cooperation is not only between educational institutions but also in establishing partnerships between educational institutions and entrepreneurs or potential employers. This may be one way that the curricula can enhance the professional skills needed to meet the demands of entrepreneurs who will become the employers of students. The entrepreneurial concept can also be an additional component to current courses that focus solely on academics.[13,14]

Furthermore, this research suggests that to forge a more fruitful collaboration among Ph.D. programs in information science in Thailand, more activities need to be initiated, such as research collaboration, content sharing in MOOCs the compilation of Thai information science expert register. These activities will further enrich library and information science education and research in Thailand and beyond.

Concluding remarks

As graduates in library and information science are the majority of information professionals in Thailand, all library schools attempt to develop appropriate curricula for the benefit of Thai society. Through the process of curriculum revisions, evaluation and suggestions from employers and stakeholders of information professionals in various organizations, library schools produce well-trained information professionals who meet the needs of the job market. Library and information science education also offers new programs both at undergraduate and graduate levels.

The benefit of national collaboration will enhance the strength of the information science education and professions within the country, as well as the pursuit for collaboration at an international level.

Notes and bibliography

1. ABIOYE, Abiola: Enhancing library and information science education through cross-border collaboration: the experience of university of Ibadan, Nigeria and University of Ghana. In: Paper presented at IFLA World Library and Information Congress, Singapore, 17–23 August 2013. Source: http://library.ifla.org/id/eprint/174/1/199-abioye-en.pdf [26 January 2022.]

2. KHOO, C.S.G.: Collaboration in LIS education in the Asean region and beyond: Issues and trends. In: Paper presented at the Seminar on Library and Information Education: Collaboration Among Asean Countries, the School of Liberal Arts, Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University, 14–16 July 2013. Source: https://hdl.handle.net/10356/101376 [22 January 2022.]

3. SACCHANAND, Chutima: Development of management strategies for collaboration in information science education and research in the ASEASN community. In: Paper presented at IFLA World Library and Information Congress, Columbus, Ohio, 13–19 August 2016. Source: http://library.ifla.org/id/eprint/1392/1/152-sacchanand-en.pdf [22 January 2022.]

4. SACCHANAND, Chutima: Library networks for distance education: A case study of Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University in Thailand. = Asian Libraries, Vol. 7. No. 10. 1998. 274–279. p. Source: http://doi.org/10.1108/10176749810241856 [28 January 2022.]

5. UKACHI, Ngozi Blessing: Collaboration among library and information science educators in West Africa: Benefits, challenges and opportunities. In: Paper presented at IFLA World Library and Information Congress, Columbus, Ohio, 13–19 August 2016. Source: http://library.ifla.org/id/eprint/1391/1/152-ukachi-en.pdf [25 January 2022.]

6. VIRKUS, Sirje: LIS education in Europe: Challenges and opportunities. In: Informationskonzepte für die Zukunft. Wien, Wolfgang Neugebauer Verlag, 2008. 191–204. p.

7. ALI-SUQRI, Mohammed Nasser: Collaboration in library and information science education in the Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC): Current status, challenges and future trends. = Emporia State Research Studies, Vol. 46. No. 2. 2010. 48–53. p.

8. VIRKUS: i. m.

9. PREMSMIT, Pimrumpai: LIS Education Programs Undergraduate Programs. = Science, Vol. 38. No. 12. 2005. 50. p.

10. BUTDISUWAN, S. – GORMAN, G. E.: Library and information science education in Thai public universities. = Education for Information, Vol. 20. 2002. 169–181. p. Source: https://www.learntechlib.org/p/105235/ [25 January 2022.]

11. SONGSAENGCHAN, S.: The development of library and information science education at Department of Library Science, Srinakharinwirot University. = Dome That, Vol. 24. No. 10. 2003. 31–44. p. (in Thai)

12. POZZO, M. I.: Achievement and challenges of international academic cooperation. The case of VISIR+ Project. = IEEE Revista Iberoamericana de Tecnologias del Aprendizaje, Vol. 14. No. 4. 2019. 145–151. p. Source: http://doi.org/10.1109/RITA.2019.2952272 [28 January 2022.]

13. PADILLA-MELÉNDEZ, A. [et al.]: Entrepreneurial university and sustainable develop-ment. The network bricolage process of academic entrepreneurs. = Sustainability, Vol. 12. No. 1403. 2020. 1–17. p. Source: http://doi.org/10.3390/su12041403 [28 January 2022.]
14. PAVLIN, S., KESTING, T., & BAAKEN, T.: An integrative view on higher education and university-business cooperation in the light of academic entrepreneurship. European. = Jour-nal of Education, Vol. 51. No. 1. 2016. 3–9. p. Source: http://doi.org/10.1111/ejed.12168 [28 January 2022.]

Namtip Wipawin is an associate professor in the Ph.D. Program at the Department of Infor-mation Science in the School of Liberal Arts of the Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University in Thailand. ORCID: 0000-0002-9436-6606

Songlak Sakulwichitsintu is qualified Senior Fellowship of the Higher Education Academy (SFHEA) with experience in online education and technology supported learning. She is a sec-retary of the Ph.D. Program and MA Program in Information Science, School of Liberal Arts, Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University. ORCID: 0000-0002-2827-2580

Chirabodee Tejasen is a lecturer in Library and Information Science, at the Faculty of Liberal Arts, Thammasat University, Thailand. He holds Master's and doctoral degrees from Nanyang Technological University, Singapore. His research interests include historical development of library and information studies, personal archive management, and historical bibliometrics. ORCID: 0000-0003-2790-5048